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id: 26468
date: 2/4/2005 12:13
refid: 05SANTODOMINGO542
origin: Embassy Santo Domingo
classification: CONFIDENTIAL
destination: 05STATE16270
header:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 000542

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA, WHA/CAR, WHA/AND, WHA/OAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2015

TAGS: PREL CO DR

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN PRESIDENT REPLIES TO AMBASSADOR ON
VENEZUELA-COLOMBIA TENSIONS

REF: A. STATE 016270

1B. STATE 011483

Classified By: Ambassador Hans Hertell. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Dominican President Leonel Fernandez confirmed to the Ambassador on January 27 that he had been helping mediate between the presidents of Colombia and Venezuela, and he found both interested in lowering tensions. He remained concerned that the candidacy for OAS SYGEN Francisco Flores had lost momentum. The Dominican Republic continues to support Flores. End summary.

12. (C) On January 27 the Ambassador outlined to Dominican President Leonel Fernandez U.S. concerns about the tensions between Venezuela and Colombia resulting in part from the arrest of FARC leader Victor Granda (ref b). Fernandez confirmed that the President of the Colombian Senate had called to enlist his help in lowering tensions, and in response Fernandez had telephoned the presidents of Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil. He knows them all well, he commented, and he has the impression that President Lula is taking a leading role, particularly given the lack of an OAS Secretary General. Fernandez considers that the Peruvians

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may not have as much weight with the various parties to the dispute, given their own domestic problems.

13. (C) Uribe is concerned, Fernandez commented, and is seeking a solution. Fernandez said that Chavez also had expressed a desire to find some accommodation. Chavez had told him that the conflict had arisen at lower levels, between the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry and the Colombian Defense Ministry; Chavez said that he had not been aware of the presence of Granda in Venezuela. Fernandez judges both presidents to be sincere. He had last spoken to them two days earlier (January 25). Fernandez commented that the respective Foreign Ministries were seeking a way to save face.

14. (C) Fernandez sees the conflict as part of the history of disputes between the neighboring countries, typical throughout Latin America. In this case the specific tensions concern sovereignty and proper legal procedure. Chavez told him that he was not protecting the FARC, he has no relations with them, and he does not support them. If the Colombians had notified him of Granda's presence and requested cooperation in legal enforcement, he would have been willing to provide it -- but the use of a bounty and the suborning of Venezuelan police officials to kidnap Granda and turn him over at the frontier was unacceptable. Fernandez points to two issues: 1) the legal argument about respect for sovereignty and 2) the need for closer collaboration between the two countries so that Venezuela is not a de facto sanctuary. After all, he commented, both countries are "bolivarian" democracies.

15. (C) Fernandez found little reason for Chavez to blame the United States for the developments and commented that perhaps the U.S. denial of involvement had in itself raised suspicions. Chavez is impulsive and easily tempted to present himself as the spokesman for the underdog, the poor and the outsiders. For example, the gathering at Puerto Alegre as an anti-Davos movement unites a wide array of discontented voices, a magnet for Chavez. The anti-globalism movement is an alliance of many different interests, including the "nostalgic left" eager to blame the successful United States for the ills suffered in other countries. Fernandez expects that the United States will have to

continue to tell its story to counter these movements. This will be difficult, he said; the "soft power" of the United States (a term invented by Joseph Nye) is an important arm.

¶6. (C) Concerning OAS SYGEN candidate Francisco Flores, Fernandez is concerned that he may have permanently lost momentum. He did not know if the U.S. public declaration would be sufficient to get him started once again.

¶7. (SBU) The Ambassador congratulated Fernandez upon the positive outlook for the Dominican submission to the IMF board and urged him to remain attentive to the agreed requirements.

HERTELL

=====CABLE ENDS=====